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# **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **U.S. Government provides scholarships to 18 journalism students from the East**

**January 7, 2009 – Colombo:** In a ceremony at the Sri Lanka Press Institute U.S. Ambassador Robert Blake presented scholarships to 18 students from the Eastern Province and Monaragala District to attend the Sri Lanka College of Journalism.

The scholarships, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will allow the students to attend the one-year Journalism Diploma Programme, focusing on radio, television, or print media. Courses are conducted in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, and all students receive English language instruction. The USAID scholarship program supports almost equal numbers of Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students, representing Ampara District (7 students), Batticaloa District (4 students), Trincomalee District (4 students), and Monaragala (3 students).

“On behalf of the American people, we are very pleased to support these young people as they begin their careers,” said U.S. Ambassador Robert Blake. “An independent media plays an important role in a democracy, ensuring good governance and encouraging open dialogue, as well as building a society where all citizens can participate fully in their communities. There is a need for more reporting from the provinces. These 18 young people will have the professional training, as well as the personal experience, to bring valuable new local perspectives to the issues,” he continued.

Each of the USAID scholarship recipients will return to their home districts or provinces to work as journalists after receiving their diplomas. This will strengthen regional reporting and ensure journalists are well-trained and prepared to cover stories that matter to area residents and Colombo decision-makers.

The USAID scholarship program is part of a larger initiative, Supporting Regional Governance (SuRG), which will invest nearly \$10 million over three years in the Eastern Province and adjoining areas. Projects will focus on democracy and governance by encouraging citizen engagement in regional and local government, strengthening inter-community reconciliation, promoting social equity, and improving open dialogue by increasing the quality and the quantity of reporting from the East.

The Diploma in Journalism Program is conducted by the Sri Lanka Press Institute through their educational arm, the Sri Lanka College of Journalism. Since 2004, the program has produced about 60 graduates per year with a 97% job placement rate in print and electronic media.

*The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided development and humanitarian assistance in developing countries worldwide for nearly 50 years. Since 1946, USAID/Sri Lanka has invested nearly \$2 billion to benefit all the people of Sri Lanka.*

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